

CONGRESSWOMAN

Carolyn McCarthy

Ongoing Work for Remainder of 107th Congress

For the remainder of the 107th Congress, Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy will continue to work on issues important to Long Islanders.

LOWERING COST OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

The Problem

The increasing cost of prescription drugs affects individuals at all levels. Individuals who are entitled to Medicare have no coverage for outpatient prescription drugs, and as a result must bear the full cost of their prescriptions. Individuals who are enrolled in HMOs, employer-sponsored insurance plans, or in private insurance plans are seeing the coverage of prescription drugs diminish and/or their co-payments rise as the insurer struggles to keep pace with the rising cost of prescription drugs. The increasing cost of prescription drugs is also an issue that must be addressed as prescription drug coverage for Medicare beneficiaries is debated.

Generic drugs play a roll in containing the cost of prescription drugs. The introduction of a generic version of a prescription drug as soon as a patent expires provides the consumer a viable option to the name brand drug at a substantially reduced price. Generic drugs often enter the market at 25 - 35% less than the name brand, and typically sell at 50% or less than the brand name version of the drug after a few years.

/ Congresswoman McCarthy's Solution

The introduction of a generic version of a prescription drug is the first step in reducing the cost of prescription drugs. To enhance competition among pharmaceutical manufacturers, Congresswoman McCarthy is developing legislation to shorten the time frame for additional generic pharmaceutical companies to enter the market place.

The legislation will also explore the extent that federal funds are supporting the development of drugs by pharmaceutical companies, through the research conducted by the National Institutes of Health.

SOLVING THE NATION'S NURSING SHORTAGE

The Problem

With the number of registered nurses down nearly 20% since 1995, Long Island is confronting an unprecedented healthcare crisis threatening hospital and patient safety that is expected to grow even worse if new ways to attract nurses are not implemented.

Because the average age of nurses is 48 and the average retirement age is 52, Long Island hospitals are expected to face major staffing shortages over the next five years. According to the New York State Department of Labor, to avert the shortage, Long Island will need to increase its total number of nurses by 19%. In 2000 alone, Long Island had an 8% Registered Nurse (RN) vacancy rate and a dangerous 16% Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) vacancy rate. Nursing staff shortages generally force nurses on duty to work longer shifts and get less sleep, which sometimes leads to life-threatening mistakes.

Magnet hospitals are hospitals that have reorganized care to be more participatory, collaborative, and patient-centered and as a result are able to attract more nurses. Magnet hospitals enjoy low turnover, and the average length of employment for registered nurses is 8.35 years, twice the length of employment in hospitals. Magnet hospital nurses consistently report greater job satisfaction than other nurses.

Magnet hospitals report lower mortality rates, higher patient satisfaction, and greater cost efficiency, with patients experiencing shorter stays in hospitals and intensive care units.

/ Congresswoman McCarthy' s Solution

Nurse Retention Quality of Care Act of 2002—will amend the Public Health Service Act to provide programs to improve nurse retention, workplace conditions, and quality of care.

Congresswoman McCarthy' s bill would provide grants to hospitals who strive to attain magnet hospital status. Grants could range from \$50,000 up to \$500,000 and suggest \$20 million for FY 2002 to FY 2007. For the evaluation of the program, the bill authorizes \$2.5 million over 5 years for a study. These grantees will demonstrate better nursing practices by:

- (1) promoting retention and satisfaction of professional nurses;
- (2) promoting collaboration and communication among health care professionals;
- (3) promoting nurse involvement in organizational and clinical decision making processes;
- (4) organizing care to enhance the satisfaction of professional nurses, improve the workplace environment, and promote the quality of care; and
- (5) promoting opportunities for professional nurses to pursue education, career advancement, and organizational recognition.